

Trinity Sunday May 26th 2024.

6.00 Holy Communion with healing prayer

Ephesians 6. 11-17, Mark 1.9-11

Recently I was talking to a member of this church about the line in the hymn “*faith believes nor questions how*”, which he very much thought should not be the case. In general, I would agree with him – we have been given brains by our Lord, and to make use of them in rationally questioning aspects of our faith is perfectly reasonable. But there are limits, places where rational thought fails. And for me the concept of the Trinity is one of them, which simply defies easy, simplistic explanations, and some leap of faith is necessary in its acceptance. Not that I have any objection to the doctrine – it is necessary to protect the faith against the errors of denying both Christ’s divinity and his humanity for example – but for most of us, most of the time, it needs to be approached in some other way than through rational thought, perhaps through what might be called our spiritual imagination.

An example of this can be found in the prayer in Worship for the Week on page 19 – the old Irish prayer known as St Patrick’s breastplate (*full text below*). Its author isn’t known, but he was certainly Irish from a very early period, and to assume it was St Patrick is probably not a bad guess. Many will know the version of this in the hymn “I bind unto myself today” but what is on the sheet is a more literal translation of the old Irish. And in the prayer, we see the writer using the Trinity as a form of clothing, wrapping it around him as protective armour, echoing the words of St Paul in our epistle who talks of putting on the whole armour of God. He firstly wraps the Trinity himself around him.

*I arise today,
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,*

Then he puts on the saving acts of Jesus,

*I arise today,
Through the strength of Christ’s birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,*

Next, he puts on the presence of all God’s people, the church created by the Spirit – from the patriarchs to the righteous men of his age, and then the power of the Father’s creation – the sun, the wind, the sea, the earth.

And of course there is a reason why such “clothing” is needed. Paul speaks of the need for protection against

*the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

And Patrick speaks rather more dramatically

*From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,*

*From everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near.
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;*

It is not a comfortable thing to admit, in our materialistic and rational age, that there are aspects of our life that are not within our control – both within us and outside us. We can be caught up in family or social situations and conflicts that aren't of our own making and illness and infirmity can occur however we may try to avoid. And the words of St Patrick still ring true, that there is knowledge that corrupts, that there is evil in the world, engrained within its very fabric, *the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*, that we see expressed in the wars and social divisions daily on the news; that there are temptations to which we are exposed; that our society is prey to the black laws of conspiracy theories, social movements that seem to have a quasi-religious form; the idolatry of both material possessions and political leaders. And it is against such as these which Patrick summons the power of the Trinity to protect him, and at the end of the prayer calling on Christ to surround him.

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,*

In a moment we will come to a time of prayer for healing – and we will pray for the protection, health and safety of all using the form in our booklet. After that there will be a time of quiet – those who wish for prayer for themselves or others can come to the Lady Chapel, and there will be the opportunity for prayer with laying on of hands or anointing. But for us all, whether or not you wish to come forward or prayer, I would invite you in that time to use the prayer of St Patrick yourself, to pray it slowly, drawing the protection of the Trinity around you against all that assails and troubles you. Use your “spiritual imagination” to interpret the words of St Patrick to your life and situation. Know that when we leave here tonight, then we have the guarding and guiding presence of the Holy Trinity surrounding us.

St. Patrick's Breastplate

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendour of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,

The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears